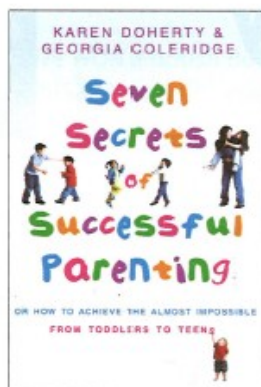


"As the anecdotes and advice started pouring in, we were staggered by their ingenuity"



We met when our children were at nursery school and we became friends when they started getting into all sorts of trouble: they flooded the school bathroom, they threw sand at other toddlers, and they even escaped from our communal gardens through a gap in the railings. With four children each [Karen has three girls and a boy and Georgia has three boys and a girl] there's been no shortage of drama in either household.

But we weren't the only parents who were struggling. Some of our friends were shattered because their child woke them up every night for years, others were fretting that their child wasn't doing well at school, and one was panicking because her daughter would only eat white food (plain pasta or sliced bread). Plenty more felt guilty about their parenting. One friend was still upset one morning after taking her children to school: "They fought all morning. I couldn't make them stop and I ended up shouting at them. When I dropped them off my son slammed the door and refused to talk to me, and my daughter went into school crying. I feel like the worst mother in the world."

original impetus was insecurity about their pear-shaped bottom and fat arms, we were also deeply conscious of our shortcomings. We were both products of broken marriages, but the issues went even deeper than that. Karen's mother was raised by strict, old-fashioned parents and in turn used excessive force on her children. She even broke her favourite wooden cooking spoon on Karen's bottom. Georgia's mother was barely brought up by her own mother who was an alcoholic, and found she was out of her depth when she had children. So though we both knew how we *didn't* want to parent, there was a lot we needed to learn.

As the anecdotes and advice started pouring in, we were staggered by their ingenuity. So many parents had wonderful advice and solutions to the problems we were facing every day. Some were obvious – why hadn't we tried that one before? Others were unusual, even life-changing. We found so much great information we couldn't keep it all to ourselves. More than anything we wanted to help people, but we needed a way to make sense of the sheer volume of material we'd gathered; to simplify it and to make it accessible to a wide audience. We wrestled with it for weeks at Karen's kitchen table over endless cups of tea while our children were at school. Finally it all came clear.

What works for parents depends so much on their own personality. If you aren't tough, setting

Parental guidance

Promoted as the Trinny and Susannah of parenting, **Karen Doherty and Georgia Coleridge** explain the genesis of their new book on coping with kids

Karen Doherty and Georgia Coleridge:
"We wrestled with it for weeks"

As we both come from a journalistic background [Karen worked at American television news networks CNBC and NBC and Georgia as the Children's Book Editor of the *Daily Mail*] we knew we must be able to find answers out there somewhere. Though *SuperNanny* makes great TV, neither of us felt marching our children to the naughty step and plonking them on it was the solution. We read endless parenting books: Steve Biddulph on raising boys, Jean Leidloff on connecting with our children, Annabel Karmel on tempting picky eaters, and dozens more. Even though we appreciated some of the advice, they didn't tell us what to do when it doesn't work. What do you do when you discipline your child and he laughs in your face and runs away, when you try to talk to him and he ignores you, or when he refuses to eat the food you've so lovingly prepared?

However, we were both great fans of Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish (the authors of the wonderful *How to Talk so Kids Will Listen and Listen so Kids Will Talk*) so we sent off to New York for their coursework and set up a local parenting group, which ran for years.

Then we got even more ambitious and started interviewing professionals and hundreds of real parents. Everywhere we went we asked questions: How do you stay calm? How do you get homework done? How do you get the television turned off? How do you stop your children fighting? What do you do when they won't listen to you? How do you persuade them to eat vegetables? How do you cope? We wanted to find out what really works.

Why were we so obsessed? Because we weren't confident that we were good parents. Like Trinny and Susannah, whose

boundaries won't come easily to you and feels too harsh. If you aren't comfortable discussing feelings, you may not want to force your child to talk. If you've been working all day, producing homemade organic food may not be your first priority. We identified seven different types of parents and worked out the secrets of their success.

The enthusiasm of friends and colleagues showed us that we were definitely onto something. Parents instantly recognised themselves and were delighted to discover what they were already doing well. One of them said it was the only parenting advice she'd ever read that didn't make her feel guilty. Another loved the wide range of anecdotes because it reminded her of chatting at the school gates, which she missed now she was back at work. A third raved about the section on understanding children's feelings and said it made her cry.

Once they felt confident they were doing something right, they said they felt less hostile about trying some of the methods that work for other people. For example, instead of feeling irritated by smug, organised parents who get their children to school every morning on time with all the right kit, they felt inspired to find out how they did it. We found that, taken together, the seven secrets can even solve complicated parenting problems such as bullying, which need a variety of approaches. They work whoever you are and wherever you're from. Whether you live in the depths of the country, on an estate in the suburbs or on the smartest street in Notting Hill, the secrets of successful parents will help.

Seven Secrets of Successful Parenting by Karen Doherty and Georgia Coleridge will be published on 21 April, 2008, as a Bantam Press trade paperback, price £12.99

