

INSIGHTS

The art of sparenting



Modern parenting has seen the rise of the uber-parent ... the parent who does it all! Well move over uber-parent and make room for sparents. They have a role to play too.

Modern parenting has seen the rise of the uber-parent... the parent who does it all, on their own.

In practice, parenting has never been done well in isolation.

In previous generations, aunts, uncles, grandparents, god parents and family friends – spare parents, or sparents – have all played a part in raising kids.

Lately it's been back to the future as an increase in adults without kids (AWOKs) within our community means there are plenty of potential sparents around. These AWOKs are aunts, uncles, mates and friends. They are everywhere, and many are ready, willing and able to take on a sparenting role.

Sparenting is all the rage

A child can never have too many spare parents.

Most of the adults without kids that I know just hanker to do some sparenting. My 25-year-old daughter just loves to babysit her young niece; she phones her brother constantly asking if she can do so. The urge to be around babies, kids and teens can be strong and needs to be satisfied.

But sparents don't have to be adults without kids. Relatives and friends with kids make great sparents too.

Of course, it's all care and no responsibility: sparents give the kids back at the end of a day or weekend. But that's okay; you don't want to divest all the child-rearing to someone else.

Sparents are good for:

- **Filling a gender gap:** If you are raising a son in an all-female household then the regular presence of an uncle, grandfather or male family friend can be the role model that's needed. Similarly, girls in all-male households can benefit from sparenting by a female friend or relative.
- **Filling a talent or interest gap:** Kids usually appreciate having an adult to share their interests, but it's hard for parents to be across all their children's hobbies and activities. Relatives or family friends can be well-placed to fill the interest void that occurs in some families.
- **Babysitting and child-minding:** There is always a need for reliable carers for kids from tots to early teens.
- **Mentoring kids who don't want to listen to their parents:** Teenage boys and girls benefit from having a number of trusted relatives or adult friends in their lives to talk with. Sparents make great confidantes and coaches for young people at a time when they are seeking independence from their parents.
- **Bringing a fresh voice and perspective to kids' lives:** Ever noticed how kids of all ages will listen to other adults more than they listen to their parents, even though the message is the same? It's frustrating, but that has always been the

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reality of raising children and young people.

- **Doing fun (and costly) things with kids:** Adults without kids usually have more disposable income than parents, placing them a good position spoil your kids. Okay, this may be a little trite but there is nothing too much wrong with the occasional splurge from adults who may have a little excess cash to share, particularly when your purse strings are stretched.

Child-rearing has always been best when it's a community affair. The recent trend towards uber-parenting – parenting as an individual endeavour – has been to the detriment of both kids and parents.

So move over uber-parent and make room for some sparents, because they too have a lot to offer your kids.



Michael Grose

Michael Grose, founder of Parenting Ideas, is one of Australia's leading parenting educators. He's an award-winning speaker and the author of 12 books for parents including *Spoonfed Generation*, and the bestselling *Why First Borns Rule the World and Last Borns Want to Change It*. Michael is a former teacher with 15 years experience, and has 30 years experience in parenting education. He also holds a Master of Educational Studies from Monash University specialising in parenting education.