



Donna and her husband with Tony, Jr., 11, Mary, 2½, Tim, 9, and Penny Jane, 13. Despite busy careers, they have managed an enviable relationship with their kids.

My children love me because I'm strict!

By DONNA REED



This famous actress reveals her approach to parenthood; though it's old-fashioned, it seems startlingly new in an age when psychology books rule most roosts

"WHAT I WOULDN'T give for a family like yours," the letter read. "Imagine, having children who enjoy their home and their parents' company! My kids look upon our home as a jail—with me as the warden—if I ask them to stay home at night..."

The mailman delivers many letters like that to our Hollywood studio. Some tug at my heart. Others beg for advice.

All of which frightens me a little, because it indicates that too many people have turned the role of parent into a complex and burdensome problem and are missing out on an incomparable joy of life.

I don't agree with those who complain that the modern child is more difficult to rear than the youngster of yesteryear. If this is true, then I must be the luckiest mother in the world. I've never read a child-psychology book, and I know nothing about the scientific methods of interpreting juvenile behavior. Indeed, my approach to parenthood undoubtedly would horrify many modern thinkers, but I've found that it can be rewarding and fun.

The answer is quite simple—be strict.

This isn't to say that the hand that rocks the cradle should pack an Ingemar Johansson wallop, or that the home should be turned into a concentration camp. On the contrary, love, understanding, and mutual respect must be the basic ingredients of any successful family relationship. Being a strict

parent simply means the establishment of "ground rules" and the enforcement of these rules through methods they understand.

At our house, for instance, we stress punctuality. I allow the children 15 minutes leeway on all arrival schedules. If they are more than 15 minutes late in returning from school or play or some other activity, they are punished. Usually, it takes the form of denied privileges—use of the telephone or the television set, or perhaps the cancellation of the weekly shopping trip.

The punishment varies according to the child's interests, of course. In other words, Penny Jane, who's 13, would be hardest hit by the loss of the usual shopping jaunt. Our boys, Tony, Jr., 11, and Tim, 9, wince at the thought of a TV blackout. Little Mary, who's only 2½, has to be dealt with on terms reserved for toddlers.

Since I was raised on a farm myself, I am a firm believer in chores for children. This isn't a case of making servants out of your children—like firing the part-time gardener when your boy becomes old enough to mow the lawn. It's simply giving each child the opportunity to make a contribution to his home—to learn that a truly happy home is the result of pitching in together.

Some of today's children would blanch at the thought of tackling the chores I handled as a young

girl. On Dad's 450-acre farm in Denison, Iowa, I drove a tractor, milked cows, pitched hay, and even baked the family bread. My brothers and sisters did, too. But we never really thought of these tasks as work. They were things the family did together.

Of course, it's important to pitch in with the children when they tackle their chores. The child will take additional pride in what he's doing, and will strive harder to please.

THE SEED for many family problems is planted on the day the allowances are passed out to the children. A hefty allowance doled out by an over-indulgent parent can give a youngster a false sense of values. I know one girl of Penny's age who gets no less than \$20 a week to spend just on clothes. Will she be equipped for anything other than a life of plenty?

We give Penny and Tony \$1.25 a week. This is supposed to cover school supplies, movies, sodas, etc. Tim gets 75 cents a week. Mary goes empty-handed but does rather well in occasional handouts at the supermarket. We seldom have any complaints, unless the children feel they can't afford certain school items on their budget. If the appeal is valid, a bonus is put into effect.

I'm firmly convinced that the very core of our juvenile delinquency problems can be traced to the

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