

The 4 Stages of Parenting

Think of parenting like building a house. There's a proper order to construction: first the foundation, then the framing, and finally the roof. Try to skip a layer and the house won't stand. Try to build just one layer and the house will never be complete. Try to work out of order and you'll fail miserably. **Parenting works like constructing a house: each of the stages is important, and you have to take them in order.** That's the best way to build your home.

The priest Eli in the Old Testament is a perfect example of what NOT to do. Eli left a dual legacy as a leader. He is most commonly known for mentoring young Samuel, the boy who was dedicated to God and who grew up to be a great prophet. But Eli failed to mentor his own sons, allowing them to misuse their authority and abuse the grace of God. God had warned Eli that their sin would destroy them and the entire family, but Eli lacked the courage to lead at home. So God sent a message through the boy Samuel.

1 Samuel 3:11-13 Then the LORD said to Samuel, "I am about to do a shocking thing in Israel. I am going to carry out all my threats against Eli and his family, from beginning to end. I have warned him that judgment is coming upon his family forever, because his sons are blaspheming God and he hasn't disciplined them."

In spite of Eli's special relationship with God, he failed to build into his sons. The end result was grown men who had not really grown up. They took advantage of people and lived shameful lives, and the result was the destruction of the entire family line.

Here are the stages Eli clearly missed as a parent. Make sure you don't miss them in your home:

Stage #1: Loving Discipline (ages 1-5)

In this stage, kids are learning how to interact with the world around them and the dangers they need to avoid. Parents have to be very consistent in drawing boundaries at this stage. Discipline needs to always be done in love, not in anger. **The purpose at the discipline stage is to teach that actions have consequences, both good and bad.**

Hebrews 12:10-11 For our earthly fathers disciplined us for a few years, doing the best they knew how. But God's discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in his holiness. No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way.

Stage #2: Training (ages 5-12)

In this stage, kids have learned about right and wrong in the home but now they are going to school and seeing how other kids act. A parent becomes more of a trainer, teaching kids how to interact in the world while not losing sight of the values taught at home. **The purpose at the training stage is to nurture a love for God and others in the hearts of our kids.** (See [Matthew 22:37-39](#).)

While parents apply consequences in the discipline stage, in this stage our kids learn the natural consequences of

their choices. We do that by letting them fail when the consequences are small. This helps them to develop the internal mechanism to drive their own choices. Parents must work hard to create a conversational culture in the home during this stage, creating an intentional environment for training.

Stage #3: Coaching (age 13-18)

In this stage, kids are forming their own identity and how they want their peers to perceive them. They desire more independence from mom and dad – which is a natural part of growing up and moving toward independence. **The purpose at the coaching stage is to release your kids to establish their own biblical convictions.** You have only a few years to transfer your values while your kids are under your roof, and it'll still require input from you.

At this stage it's helpful to find a mentor for your teen. Think of that person as a subcontractor, working under you (the contractor) to help affirm your values and worldview. Eventually, you can empower your teen to become a mentor, helping others to pursue God like you have helped him or her. This, after all, is the best way for your teen to mature.

Stage #4: Friendship (ages 18+)

In this phase, your kids have likely moved out on their own. The active parenting stage is over and your kids must take full responsibility for their choices. **The purpose at the friendship stage is to release your kids to be mature, responsible adults.** Advise and encourage, but resist the urge to bail your kids out or protect them from the consequences of their poor choices. Pray for them and cheer them on in life.

Joshua in the Old Testament serves as a great example for parents in this stage. At the end of his life, after faithfully leading the Israelites and with children and grandchildren listening in, he gave his final speech and challenge:

Joshua 24:14-15 “So fear the LORD and serve him wholeheartedly..... But if you refuse to serve the LORD, then choose today whom you will serve. Would you prefer the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates? Or will it be the gods of the Amorites in whose land you now live? But as for me and my family, we will serve the LORD.”

Watch and Discuss:

1. **Set Up:** Watch the video together or invite someone to [summarize the topic](#).
2. What is your initial reaction to this topic? Explain.
3. What stage(s) are you in with the ages of your kids right now?
4. What do you think the major differences are between the discipline years vs. the training years?
5. Why is it important for parents to become more of a coach in the teenage years?
6. What are the dangers of wanting to be friends with your kids prematurely?
7. How does this information change your strategy for parenting?
8. **Takeaway:** Write a [personal action step](#) based on this conversation.