

HOLISTIC HEALTH NOTEBOOK

Parenting rules have future benefits

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It is tough being a parent. Often, it is you against the world.

My kids, who were not known for their distinguished palates. They used to complain, "Mom, you are the only parent in the world with rules like this." I didn't know whether to cheer or cry. Am I really that wonderfully unique (if so, where are all the other parents)? Or wacko, as my kids thought?

I will admit to some unusual rules. No breakfast cereal with more than 3 grams of sugar per serving. Yogurt must be plain. No soft drinks. Eat vegetables. No TV from Sunday morning through Friday evening and only three hours on weekends.

The results? My kids eat far better than their peers. They are avid artists and readers, and can hold a stimulating conversation. None have served prison time and two are married to fine young men. Something stuck.

Putting the humor aside, it is hard to instill good eating habits in children who are bombarded with opposite messages. You are not paranoid. They really are out to get you.

For example, over \$1.5 billion are spent each month marketing to children, and these budgets are increasing every year. The top advertisers are Burger King, Cad-

bury Adams, Campbell Soup, Coca-Cola, ConAgra Foods, General Mills, Hershey, Kellogg, Kraft Foods, McDonald's, PepsiCo, and Unilever (Slim Fast, Popsicle, Hellman's, Breyers, and others).

The average American child may view as many as 40,000 TV commercials every year. In 2002, children ages four to twelve spent \$40 billion, and in 2000, children 12 years and under influenced the household spending of over \$600 billion annually. There are big bucks in those little britches.

You may be surprised to learn that marketing companies hire psychologists to learn how to drive that message home. Ethics? I think not. In fact, the American Psychological Association has convened a task force to study the ethical problem associated with this practice.

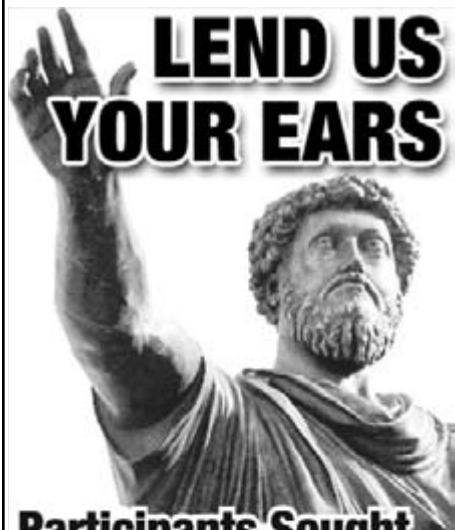
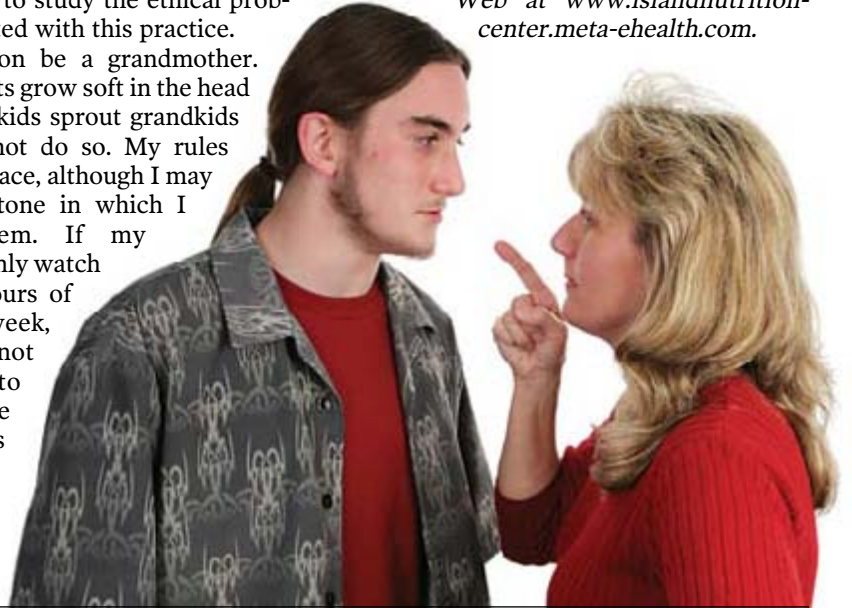
I will soon be a grandmother. Some parents grow soft in the head when their kids sprout grandkids but I will not do so. My rules remain in place, although I may soften the tone in which I deliver them. If my grandkids only watch a couple hours of TV per week, they are not exposed to the perverse messages delivered in the commercials. The same

standard for breakfast cereal will prevail but we will make homemade granola, and we'll enjoy lots of kitchen time together.

We'll make our own cookies and cut the sugar in half (no one will notice), and we'll make lemonade from fresh lemons and stevia.

I will hug them daily and teach them to be healthy and smart, and we'll talk about how to do that. I will stand beside my daughters as they instill healthy habits in their kids and not sneak candy into the house behind their backs, because they need all the support they can get. ■

— Carol Simontacchi is the owner of the Island Nutrition Center on Sanibel. She can be reached at 472-4499 or on the Web at www.islandnutrition-center.meta-ehealth.com.



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