

## Life's Paradox

*uncommon reflections of life matters*

# Parenting Wisdom

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“That car in front is dumb!” Xian, my 5-year-old retorted, as I was driving my brood to school one morning. My intuitive response was to tell Xian my take on this: that cars are inanimate objects and that they cannot sense things like we do. She means the *driver* of the car is dumb, right? Instead, I have learnt over the past 7 years (challenged by both Xian and my 7-year-old first born son, Jett) that it usually is safer to go counter-intuitive.

So I decided to enquire instead: “I am curious because I thought cars can’t possibly be dumb because they don’t feel or sense things like we do. (I felt good about getting my opinion across this way, don’t you?) What makes you think they can feel like that?”

Jett pipes up: “When cars collide, they sense the collision and their air bags come out as a result.” Sure, it does seem that cars can *react* to circumstances.

Xian continues: “When you park your car, Mum, and get too close to something you could hit, the car tells you so by beeping!” Point taken – cars have parking *sensors*. (not quite like our five *senses* – but close.)

OK. I get it. Cars have sensors and can seemingly react predictably ... and I can see the metaphorical equivalence.

The point is: If I had jumped in to inflict my view on the matter, I would have lost the opportunity to wander into their world and explored it from their perspective.



## Acknowledging different world views

Isn't it fascinating how children think? Too often in the past, I have been guilty of not listening and simply imposing my model of the world on them. I am now on a mission to navigate every one of the models by which children perceive and construct their world. What amazes me most consistently is the fresh perspective by which they experience the world.

As parents we are given the gifts of our children, I believe, as a magical mirror by which they can honestly reflect what we most need to develop in ourselves. It is truly an unconditionally loving learning partnership. Our part is not to be too anxious about doing parenting perfectly. It is about welcoming this natural collaboration where as we grow to our authentic best and uncover our innate genius, we allow their inborn genius to blossom, flourish and express itself.

Buckminster Fuller, the American philosopher, said: "We are all born geniuses. It is society that de-geniuses us" ... through the limiting beliefs that get installed unconsciously along the way!

As parents and care-givers holding the space for children to live their highest potential, it is an honour and a privilege to be modeling genius at its best. It certainly makes parenting less of a necessary responsibility and more of a joyful experience of collaborative development.

Have you wondered how children find wonder in all that they see, hear and do?  
What is it that makes children find new possibilities so easily?  
What compels children to find learning fun and joyful?  
When did we in essence stop being children?  
How can we re-discover the genius in us and allow this child prodigy to express itself?

How would it be like for you if parenting is simply a journey of stepping into the world of our children and making a conscious decision to review what we have learnt to think/feel is true and consider other possibilities of reality?

How curious would it be if we were also the mirror by which our children have been given so we too can reflect to them what they most need to learn?

What possibilities open up for you as we consider the magnificent balance of this beautiful learning partnership?

Would parenting become less laborious and more joyful as we see this role as less of what we have to do and more of what we love to be?



## The Wisdom Pattern for Parenting

A wise person once told me: “Your opinion is worth nothing ...if that is all you have.” What does that mean?

Imagine yourself face to face with your children holding a pen horizontally in front of you. They say to you: “the pen nib is pointing to the *left*.” From your vantage point, there is no doubt it is pointing *right*. Both of you are correct from your individual point of view. Yet the two statements are diametrically opposed. At that level of thinking, there is no agreement. If we then looked at it from a third perspective that makes the situation true for both parties, and announce that “The nib is pointing *North* (or whatever cardinal point of the compass is true at the time)”, we would now both be in agreement.

This is what we call “Wisdom” – the ability to see one situation from multiple perspectives. In order to be wiser in any circumstance, we need to train ourselves to experience that event from a minimum of three positions. This is what we call the ***Wisdom Pattern***.

There is an assumption for a positive outcome in any interpersonal interaction between parents and their children: that we have an **intention** to get along, to want to resolve any issue or at least to come through with an objective non-judgmental result.

Let us consider a scenario that happened between my children and I. We have had a big day out together. Jett and Xian are fighting over what I consider a petty issue yet again, and I am losing it! They are screaming and pushing at each other. My attempts to separate them physically are falling on deaf ears. I raise my voice with stronger threats – to no avail. I am exhausted. If I do not do something quickly, somebody is going to get hurt. What do I do? My initial thoughts were to smack them both and send them to bed with no dinner! Does a mother at the end of her tether not be allowed to impose her authority because she can?

I took a deep breath and decided to step back instead and consider the Wisdom Pattern.

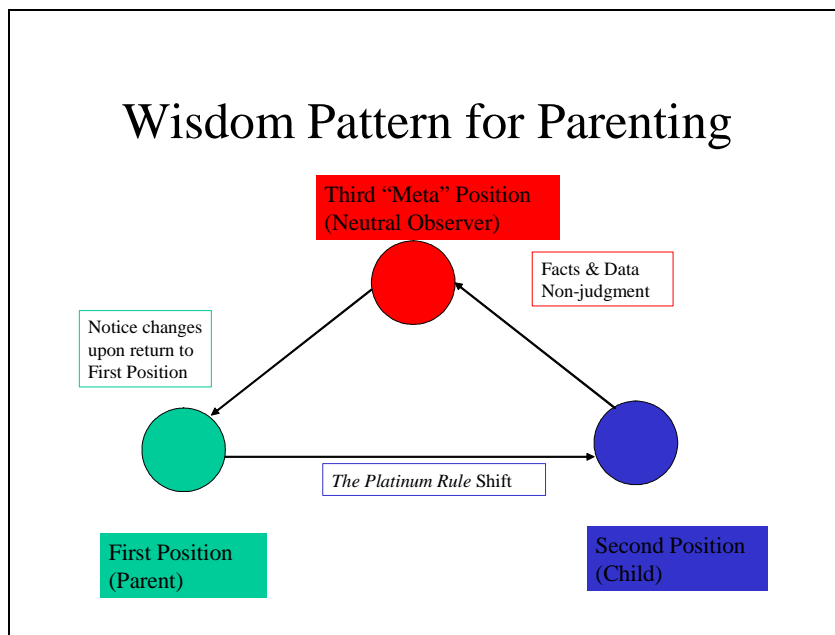
## Moving through multiple perspectives

From my perspective, which we shall term the ***First Position***, I can unreservedly say that it takes two to get a fight going. As the children have heard me time and again (and I repeat it here), it does not matter who started the fight. Whoever continues is just as much in the wrong. “Stop fighting and use your words (ie. work out your differences yourselves), or you will both be punished!” This is what I was yelling over the din. Nobody was taking any notice. At this rate, I will have to punish them



both. I do not believe in violence as a disciplinary option, and yet the thought of smacking them was surfacing quickly.

From the *Second Position* where the children are coming from, they are not listening to my usual banter about both being in the wrong regardless of who initiated it. They've heard it all before. Somebody has to be more wrong, and Mum should just deal with the matter for us. Can't she see that we can't work it out – whether with words or fisticuffs? She has to help us work this out – after all, isn't that what Mum should do? She fixes everything. Come on, Mum, tell us who is wrong – use *your* words! Then to be fair: punish the culprit and get on with it!



Should we continue to maintain our respective positions, the situation is likely to get more heated and deteriorate further. The more we stick to our guns, the more emotional it will develop.

### The Platinum Rule of Wisdom

Most have heard of The Golden Rule of Wisdom spanning many cultures, which states: “Do unto others as *you* would like *them* to do unto *you*.” Let me relate to you the rule that overrides it. The Platinum Rule of Wisdom proclaims: “Do unto others as *they* would like *you* to do unto *them*.”

Imagine what it would be like if I stepped into the children’s shoes and experienced the whole situation through their point of view. As I went into *Second Position*, I now see myself in *First Position* doing my angry mother role, and experience it as if I were the children. I began to appreciate how the children were not listening because I



truly did not understand where they were coming from. Here I was in *First Position* playing the authoritarian tyrant, getting frustrated trying to get myself heard over the din! Instead, it seems that it would be more useful if I used my words to say, create a situation where each of those children could be heard.

What if I am a fly on the wall? As a neutral observer, I can see and hear the mother trying to stop a fight that is escalating between two children. The children are becoming more physically violent, and the mother is raising her voice more and more. The children are ignoring the mother now. She clenches her jaws and fists and stands seemingly contemplating what to do next. This is a factual and unemotional report from a *Third Position*.

From this 'Meta' (literally above and beyond the situation at hand) perspective, there is no judgment. Because this *Third Position* forces me step back to look at this 'movie' without the emotional charges, I began to see how it would not be possible to stop the fight by punishing both as resentment could still simmer if I, as the Authority, told them to do so. It would be more useful to give each one of them the opportunity to voice their case in a manner perceived as fair and equitable to both.

Now that I have taken at least three different perspectives of this matter, I return to *First Position* and notice what has changed. I discovered that the charge of the situation had lessened and I can now respond with more objectivity and calmness. I took a deep breath and stood between the children, saying firmly: "I need your help. Please stop so we can all talk about what is happening NOW."

Miraculously, Jett and Xian stopped and looked at me with enquiring eyes. I told them that I was sad to see brother and sister fighting and I wanted them to help me see what caused it so we can prevent it happening again. They both agreed to help. I asked them to go to two separate rooms – where I had just 2 minutes with each. I asked each to tell me what (not who) caused the fight and how each could prevent it before it next happened.

### From the mouth of babes

This uncorroborated information surfaced:

Jett told me that I did not get angry as easily as others (eg their dad, grandparents and the teachers) so they felt comfortable fighting in my presence. (Now that's new information for me!) I asked him if he knew that I did not express my anger to the same degree, but instead feel very saddened and disappointed because I do not like violent behaviour. Shaking his head, he said he didn't know that. Yet now that he knew, he would help me by not baiting his sister as much! Instead, should she start the fight, he would remind her that Mum is happier if we tried to work things out instead as Mum is saddened by violence.



In interviewing Xian, she told me that her brother brings out the worst in her when I am there, as she feels comfortable being physical to sort things out because I do not get angry easily. (Voila! There it is again!) When she found out that it was sadness and disappointment that I felt instead of anger, she also decided to help by using her words instead of punches and kicks to resolve conflicts with Jett.

There have been no fights between the two children since our conversation. I am amazed at how children honour their words.

Isn't it interesting that my issue against violent behaviour brought up (under crisis) how I was going to resort to violence (smack the kids) in the first place? Was that going to be a useful behaviour to model to the children if I had done that? In choosing to be counter-intuitive, and to ask for the children's help – we have now dissolved the problem in my inviting them to be part of the solution.

### Have a go

Don't take my word for it. Try it yourself with circumstances that have occurred in the past (or which may be happening right now). For instance, it may be a disagreement with your significant other on discipline of the children, or it might have been an argument you have had with your mother in law. Perhaps it was an angry exchange with your teenager over the completion (or lack) of a task. Move through the three positions and notice what changed when you return to first base.

When one is making future plans, wisdom training could be useful to research the different angles. The viewpoints of different stakeholders could be identified and worked through objectively. For instance, before planning a family holiday, it may be interesting to explore the perspectives of your spouse, the children, or even the house-sitter/dog-sitter for when you are away.

So the next time you become aware of a situation that could potentially turn ugly, I invite you to explore the Wisdom Pattern as a simple tool to defuse a highly charged situation and to gain new insights or possibilities in any interpersonal impasse.

### Generalize it through your life

Remember that the skill of wisdom training can be applied to times when you are dealing with business associates, friends and social acquaintances. Pounce at the opportunity to turn that explosive argument around with your business partner. What about those debates you have with your mates concerning say, politics, sports and religion? And those dinner parties when a controversial topic gets unveiled and those present start to stake out their battle stations?



You will be amazed at how just one person altering their response completely changes the dynamics of the situation. Once again, don't take my word for it. Go test it.

Rest assured that the more you learn and practise this Wisdom Pattern, the more you realize the impact of parenting applications in all areas of your life. The more you are conscious of different perspectives occurring in different contexts from day to day, the more you will notice the transformation in your ideal way of being who you are when relating to colleagues, business associates, team members, clients, acquaintances, friends, family and all those meaningful people in both your personal and professional life.

After all, isn't parenting about being your authentic best so you can be a role model to unleash the highest potential in your children?

Enjoy exploring the genius in you. I know your life will never be the same again. Here's to the joy of parenthood.

That is the magic of gaining parenting wisdom.

**Live your Voice – Walk your talk**

**Live your Vision – Be your word**

**Live your Values – To thine self be true**

## Bibliography

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- Bond, Philippa NLP Practitioner Manual. Inform Training & Research. 1998

**About the Author: Dr Yvonne Sum** is a pioneer in Parent Leadership coaching. She is on a quest to co-create joyful learning partnerships between parents and children to simultaneously bring out each other's authentic best. She inspires parents to learn from our children mirroring to us what we most need to learn about ourselves and vice-versa. Through her series of **Transformational Leadership Challenge™ (TLC) Intentional Parenting and Intentional Living** programs, Dr Sum is committed to transform leaders of tomorrow today by highlighting family values and celebrating parents as role models and heroes in life who proactively unleash our children's potential through self actualization, intentional living and powerful leadership centred on love and high purpose. She expresses this passion to bring out our authentic best through her roles as an international speaker, writer, transformational corporate facilitator, executive and parent Meta-Coach, Neuro Linguistic Programming trainer, business woman, wife and mother. Please visit [www.dryvonesum.com](http://www.dryvonesum.com) for more information.

