

## Parenting in the 21st century

Bringing up “the Digital Generation” presents new challenges for parents.

Screaming, yelling, tantrums and fights—and that’s just when your children will look at you. Sometimes it’s worse when they shut down, pop on the headphones, go online and refuse to talk. Judy Arnall, BA’88, has seen it all.

As a parenting expert and a mother of five, Arnall has a broad understanding of the issues facing parents, families and relationships in the 21st century. She believes all parents have the ability to communicate effectively with their children, from early childhood to the challenge of the pre-teen to the young adult who springs up in front of a mother and father’s eyes.

Arnall is an award-winning international speaker and a presenter of seminars on various parenting topics including the ever-popular, *Plugged-In Parenting: Connecting with the Digital Generation for Health, Safety and Love*. She is also the author of the Canadian bestseller *Discipline Without Distress: 135 tools for raising caring, responsible children without time-out, spanking, punishment or bribery*. As well, she has written many articles on parenting, published in various newspapers, magazines and periodicals.

“Parenting has changed due to technology in two ways,” explains Arnall. “First, our research technology enables us to study the brain and see how stress affects brain development, how learning can be enhanced and how the brain develops in response to nurturing and stimulation. For example, we now know that the frontal lobes in teens do not finish developing until age 25—who knew that there was a biological basis for those illogical decisions they make at 21?”

“Second, families spend less time together but are more connected in superficial, fragmented ways through technology such as computers and cellphones,” she continues. “Our mode of communication has changed in that we can’t control or supervise our children through traditional ways such as neighbourhood watches. We can’t control our kids through fear-based parenting methods because they don’t work anymore. We can’t enforce the consequences.”

Arnall says 21st century children are the first generation to be more culturally adapted than their parents. They have the power of technology and can use that to gain control over parents, teachers and peers.

But some things never change. Bullying, school marks, chores, friends, hairstyles, drugs, alcohol, gangs, sex, sibling fighting, rebelling and vandalism are all still front and centre in the minds of kids. The only difference is that today they can be found in different formats. And Arnall says parents today, just like their parents and grandparents before them, make the same mistakes: they listen, but not actively.

“What does and will always work is to build our influence with our children through open communication and problem solving,” she says. Punishing kids is out. Problem solving is in, because



Riley Brandt

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respect and teaching/learning has been proven to be more effective in keeping kids safe, than iron control and fear-based authoritarian parenting.

“Parents may lose their control, but never their influence if their relationship is a good one. And computers will never replace a parent’s hug.”

Arnall is leading a U of C Continuing Education course this fall; Parent Effectiveness Training (PIW 100) will focus on learning skills to enhance the parent-child relationship. The course will be offered in October, March and April. For more information, visit [www.conted.ucalgary.ca](http://www.conted.ucalgary.ca) or connect with Arnall at [www.professionalparenting.ca](http://www.professionalparenting.ca). **U**

—Betty Rice