

THE TIMES

# MILK

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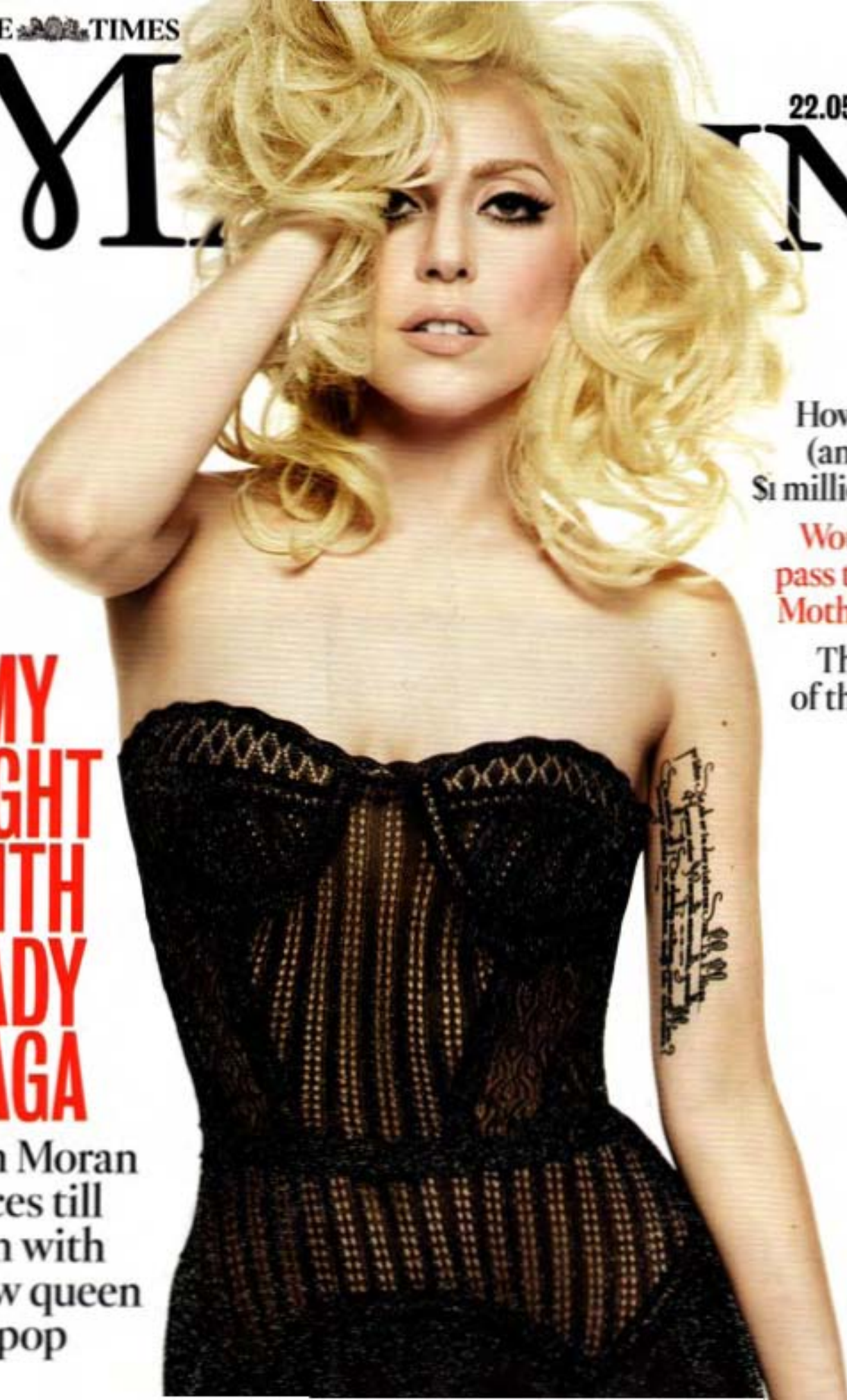
How to win  
(and lose)  
£1 million in Vegas

Would you  
pass the Goo  
Mother Test?

The end  
of the It bag

## MY NIGHT WITH LADY GAGA

Caitlin Moran  
dances till  
dawn with  
the new queen  
of pop





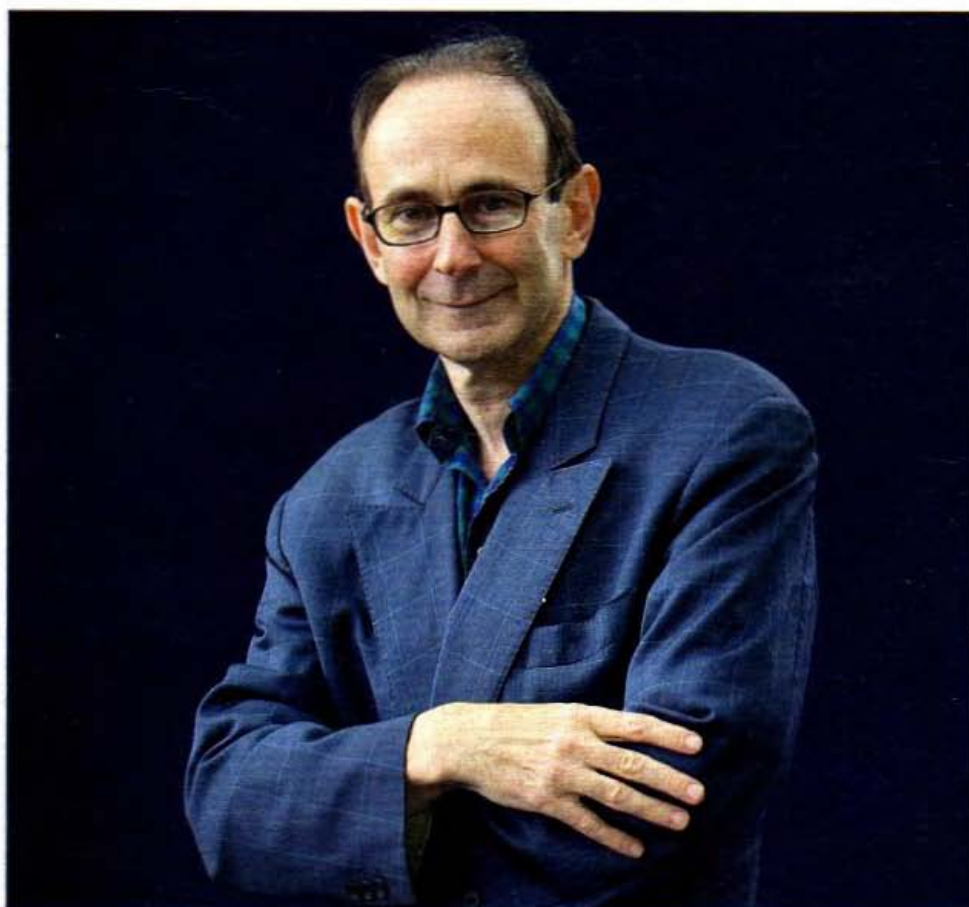
**W**hen Oliver James shuffles into the wood-panelled lobby of Oxford's smartest hotel, wearing an old green fisherman's sweater, loose scarf and worn corduroys, he does not look like a man who is about to have a Mumsnet-type fatwa put upon him. With his high, pale domed forehead and wispy long hair, he appears more a gentle, sunlit-starved don in need of nourishment.

There is something rather fragile about James, mixed with a diffident bookishness, which is a paradox given that he is one of Britain's most controversial and outspoken popular psychologists, a self-confessed "bigoted taxi driver" who in the past has sounded off on the radio, in newspaper columns, on the television, in his increasingly bestselling books (*Britain on the Couch*, 1997; *Affluenza*, 2007, to name but two) on anything from the narcissism of the ruling elite (Peter Mandelson "built his whole identity around his relationship with his mother and grandfather"; he also predicted that Brown suffered from depression) to the emotional paucity of a greedy, aspirational society, wrecked by Thatcherism and pathetically obsessed with wealth.

Today he is clutching a copy of his forthcoming book, *How Not to F\*\*\* Them Up*, in which he has turned his psychological gaze on middle-class mothers and the ways in which they – we – care for our children aged 0-3. Back in 2002, he wrote *They F\*\*\* You Up*, a title taken from the Larkin poem, in which he explored how it is parenting in the early years, not genes, that makes us what we are, and can lead to lifelong insecurity (40 per cent of all adults are insecure, he claims), bad relationships, depression and violence. Now, he has honed his focus and taken the thesis one step further, providing guidance for mothers (only those wealthy enough to enjoy "choice" – poor ones don't seem to be included) on how to get it right, how to provide a good foundation for happiness and emotional security. Get it wrong in this crucial period, he warns in the book, through decisions taken, subconscious miscalculations, through not knowing yourself or engaging in acts of self-deception then, basically, to use his parlance, your children are f\*\*\*ed. And you are to blame.

In a modern society in which some degree of anxiety and guilt has come to afflict nearly all mothers, women muddling through day by day trying to live with their compromises, it takes a brave man – a man! – to weigh into the debate and tell us how to do it better, offering by way of incentive to try harder the spectre of a generation of emotionally damaged children. As if we didn't feel bad enough already.

If the new book, based on scientific studies and interviews with 50 mothers found on the



internet, some working, some not, has one clear message, it is this: all babies and toddlers "need to be in the presence of a responsive, loving adult at all times in order to thrive", either the mother or a mother substitute (the pecking order of substitutes is this: father, granny, nanny, minder, day care). "They do not need a teacher, they do not need friends, stimulation or education," he writes.

Anything less can lead to insecure attachments, the inability to form healthy relationships in later life, at work, with lovers, with friends, right through to triggering mental illness and violence. Nurseries are presented as pretty much the equivalent of setting your child on the road to Prozac – "[It is] accepted by all scientific authorities: some kinds of non-maternal care, particularly day care, considerably increase the risk of the child becoming aggressive and disobedient." Women who think in terms of "stimulating, cognitive" based care involving other babies and toddlers are misled. Controlled crying methods, as advised by Gina Ford, stress the baby, even damage it – "There is good evidence that strict sleep routines do lead to more insecure, and to more irritable and fussy babies." Disciplining methods such as the naughty step, star charts and saying, "Don't!" and "Naughty!" run the

risk of training your child "like a dog in a laboratory". "Calling them bad and naughty is completely inappropriate at this age and only serves to make them feel unhappy, rather than learning any useful lesson... Time-out and naughty steps give the message that the child is unloved and leaves it to stew in its juices, liable to feel abandoned and rejected, creating resentment and surly anger."

Any stress in the last trimester of pregnancy, through work or life demands, raises the stress hormone cortisol in the unborn child, potentially affecting its behaviour for a long time after birth. Women who read inherent genetic characteristics into their "lively" baby such as the need for interaction are self-deceiving and projecting their own needs. If a toddler is having a hissy fit, it is because she is not getting what she needs from "YOU!" (the young child, unable to make sense of itself, is never to blame) and when pregnant mothers worry about the forthcoming birth, what they are often really worrying about is the mothering period that what will follow it. Oh, OK then.

I admit to James, as he settles himself into a sofa, that despite his avowals in the introduction of not wishing to provoke a "tsunami of apprehension in the reader", his book had



precisely this effect on me. He looks crestfallen. "God knows I am nervous about this book," he says quietly. "People have been asking me to write it for a long time, and always my response was the same: What right do I have to write it being a man? Secondly, why raise all these difficult questions for women who are anyway struggling with the extremely difficult job of trying to work it out and who are probably engaged with these questions anyway? Why do I have to create all these problems for them and then back them up with science?" Quite. He sighs.

He changed his mind, he says, because, ultimately, he felt strongly about his message that young children need one-on-one care, regardless of who is providing it. It is a passionately held, well-argued belief and he insists this is his only prejudice. The new book is directed at mothers only because mothers end up doing most of the work and most of the worrying, something he hopes will change. "The idea that only women worry about this stuff is ridiculous. Men are going to have to start doing it too. I know lots of men who actually love looking after their children and love being involved with them and if they were given a bit more incentive and put under a bit more pressure by their wives and partners, they would do more. So that is the starting point."

James admits that he has a friend who checks all his books for his "tone", getting rid of anything that might hoist him by his own petard. Well, you should also have got her to cut the bit at the beginning, I say, the bit where you explain your methods and then write to the female reader, "Off you go!" "Oh dear," he says. "She'll kick herself for missing that."

Using solid scientific research, mostly based on the theories of a British psychoanalyst and psychologist called Joan Raphael-Leff, James divides mothers of small children into three categories – the organiser, the hugger and the flexi-mum. How well you respond to your baby depends on how well you understand yourself. The organiser is the kind of mother to adopt Gina Ford, to want the baby to adapt to her, the hugger is totally baby-focused to the exclusion of others and the flexi-mum, roughly half of mothers, a combination of the two and the most likely to escape depression. James tries hard to refrain from presenting a "right" and "wrong" way, although he does state the "hugger" is probably best equipped to meet the needs of the under-threes. All the stereotypes – because, let's be honest, that is what they are – have pros and cons. As a father, how would James himself like to be stereotyped like that?

"As long as it was based on reality, I wouldn't mind," he replies. (The categories are recognisable, and when I run them past a random collection of mothers, they all agree.)

The key to successful mothering, James says, is to work out which one you are, by

## THE GOOD MOTHER TEST – HOW DO YOU SCORE?

*Don't make your child apologise or put them into nursery:  
the new rules for modern parents, according to Oliver James*

### Avoid day care

There seems little doubt that day care raises cortisol levels [the fight-flight stress hormone]. While disrupted cortisol levels may be associated with many problems, including depression and fearfulness, there is considerable evidence they also affect aggression and good conduct. If so, when children raised in day care are compared with ones raised at home, they should be more aggressive.

The NICHD study, which followed 1,000 children from early childhood, found that the more time a child spent in non-maternal care (most of it day care), the more disharmonious was its relationship with its mother when with her. The findings were similar for problem behaviours involving aggression and disobedience. The more time the child was in non-maternal care of any kind during its first five years, the greater their difficultness in three key respects:

- Assertiveness: they talked too much, bragged or boasted and argued a lot.
- Disobedience: they talked out of turn, were disobedient at school, defiantly talked back at school staff and disrupted discipline.
- Aggression: they got into many fights, were prone to cruelty, bullying or meanness, they physically attacked others and they destroyed their own possessions.

### Don't leave them alone for long

Prolonged separation from parents has been shown to have caused long-term depression and insecurity in large samples of adults who were evacuated during the Second World War when measured decades later. In one sample, there was a higher likelihood of adult depression if the evacuation occurred aged 4 to 6 years old rather than at age 13. In another, depression was nearly twice as common in evacuees compared with children not separated, or ones with their mothers but not with fathers, absent due to military work. In a final study, those evacuated between the ages of 4 and 6 years showed much higher likelihood of insecure attachment (54 per cent), compared to those not evacuated (32 per cent), the younger the age of evacuation, the greater the insecurity.

Other findings indicate that extended or repeated separation from the mother in

itself causes longterm emotional problems in adulthood, in particular, borderline personality disorder. This was so even after other factors were controlled, and the longer and earlier the separation, the greater the risk of developing this problem. Day care entails repeated and more or less prolonged separation from mother. It would not be surprising if it has similar, albeit less severe, long-term effects.

### Never use the naughty step

Contrary to claims for naughty step methods, when used on such young children it actually often results in repetition of the undesired behaviour, rather than successful management. If you are not careful, you are just creating a guaranteed method for your toddler to wind you up. If they do eventually modify their behaviour what is the lesson they have learnt? That might be right and that they need to be more devious to avoid being coerced. As a parent of a child of this age, you need to realise that if things go pear-shaped it is actually always your fault, in the sense that if you keep a close enough eye on them you can prevent atrocities. Inevitably it's sometimes going to go wrong, but do not assume the child is wilfully trying to annoy you. Calling them bad and naughty is inappropriate at this age and only serves to make them feel unhappy, rather than learning any useful lesson. The unhappier they are, the more they are likely to go around upsetting other kids, trying to offload their anger or misery on to others, as adults do in offices (or partners at home).

### Avoid stress during pregnancy

One study revealed a strong independent impact of high levels of stress in the last three months of the pregnancy (known as the third trimester), including measurement of cortisol, the fight-flight stress hormone. Even when the children had reached the age of 10, there was still an effect if the mother had been stressed in the third trimester. The high levels of cortisol are passed through the placenta to the foetus and when it is born, it is already liable to have abnormal cortisol levels. This is still the case at the age of 10, expressed in such problems as anxiety, attention deficits, hyperactivity and behavioural problems.



looking at how you feel as well as the baggage of your childhood, and make sure your baby is looked after accordingly. There's no point pretending you are a hugger when babies bore you. Nor should you drive yourself back to work just because subconsciously you feel your own parents have pushed you all your life to "achieve". If you suspect you are damaged by your childhood, his advice is to get proper psychoanalysis specialising in early attachment to avoid passing it on. In the current climate, who can justify that expense? "I agree that is a very real difficulty with some of the advice I give in the book, but if you want to know what I think might be the best thing to do if you are going to do anything, that would be it."

"The last thing I want to do is create more trouble for a group of people – mothers – whom I care passionately about and want the best for," he continues with obvious and genuine emotion. "I really don't want to make life more difficult. I'm really trying to make it easier."

But what about this vociferous abhorrence of nurseries, which I tell him many women

## 'I've never really made it public, but in 1986 I was diagnosed with MS, which did limit how much I could physically do to help'

will find very threatening and upsetting, especially if they have opted for this choice. And what can be wrong with the naughty step when you've got a wilful, puce-faced toddler thrashing around in the manner of a mini dictator? "Well, obviously it's better than smacking, but I'm just against this idea of 'taming the beast in the nursery', this step-by-step discipline guide that can solve it all."

A large part of his resistance to the idea of day care is how it has been co-opted by Labour to try to get women back to work in badly paid, unrewarding jobs. "Why can't they help women in other ways?" he asks. "Or do what Austria does and provide women with the choice of the average wage for two years so they can pay somebody, such as a nanny or minder, properly or do it themselves? If they bail out the banks for £168 billion, why the f\*\*\* can't they make it easier for mothers?" Nurseries, he says scornfully, have a 40 per cent turnover of staff and are often badly run, with untrained carers and poor child/worker ratios, "despite what they claim".

Get him on New Labour politicians and Labour's Sure Start scheme and insults spew forth – "jumped-up prick" and "f\*\*\*ing

bollocks"; "What the f\*\*\* do they know? They know nothing." But cut through this taxi driver rant, and it is obvious that James is truly on the side of women and creating a society in which parenting and the issues it raises are shared between both partners.

It is telling that James came to fatherhood late. He is 56 now and was 48 when he had his first child, a girl, now 8, followed by a boy, aged 5. He is clearly an adoring father, living in rural harmony in Oxfordshire. His wife, the Oxbridge-educated former journalist Clare Garner, does not work at the moment. Is she a hugger? Are you a hugger at home? "I promised her I wouldn't talk about the children or her mothering," he says. But that's a cop-out. "It's not fair on her," he says. "I respect that." I get the impression you favour the hugging approach? "Why?" he says. Because of your tone. He laughs. "Look, I am 56 and I bring to my experience certain prejudices of a man of my generation. I did think I had to be the breadwinner."

"I suppose the only thing that gives me any integrity in this book is that I do understand the science and that I work from home and I've been very much involved with the care of my own children... I suppose I can say this to you although I've never really made it public, but in 1986 I was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis and two years before my daughter was born it got worse, which did limit how much I could physically do to help."

Luckily, the MS has remained at a stable level. He can't walk round a golf course, he says, nor could he look after the children full-time all the time, but he has done it for short periods in the past, enough to see "the enormity of the demands that are being made on you if you are a parent looking after a child".

He is not remotely anti-working mothers, he stresses. He points to the many examples in the book of women for whom it would be disastrous to stay at home, not only for them but for their baby. "I am not very good at dissembling. I truly believe that for some women work is essential. It is part of their identity. My mother was a classic case in point. She wanted to be a hugger but was actually a not very good flexi who was depressed a lot of the time."

Ah yes, James's mother, now dead, whose failing of James in his infancy looms large in *How Not to F\*\*\* Them Up*. If ever there was a shrink to prove the cliché that all shrinks are f\*\*\*\*\* up, James is it. In fact, James has spent the last 40 years of his life "doing a lot of work on himself". It is no surprise to learn that he reached the conclusion that his mother was largely to blame.

Oliver James comes from a family of four children born to London-based psychoanalysts. Both his mother, Lydia

## Don't blame it on their genes

There are strong grounds for parents to avoid assuming their child has a genetically caused trait that cannot be changed.

Further, it suggests it is best not to assume that your baby or toddler is deliberately, wilfully, intentionally seeking to behave badly (based on this unchangeable trait) because you are more likely to react angrily and with frustration if you think they are trying to wind you up, and you are at greater risk of responding with harsh, aggressive and even abusive parenting behaviour.

As countless studies have proven, it is that kind of parenting (and not genes) which actually causes children to become aggressive, hostile, violent and to have attention deficits.

## Never expect them to say sorry

Whether it's sorry, or important please and thank yous, you should not expect them to manage a proper understanding much before 3. When so small, they usually feel completely justified in having lashed out at another child, even though it was their fault, and was unprovoked.

At this age, it is expecting too much for them to understand the wider context and their responsibility within it and if they do lash out, in a sense it is always your fault. The lashing out will be happening because they are tired, or hungry, or envious of a sibling, and although the victim is guiltless, so is this perpetrator: it would not have happened if you had kept a better eye on the situation, which, of course, we cannot be expected to do at all times.

It is for this reason that it really can make sense for you to be making the apology, and doing so to the appalled other parent. Not only is this the truth, it provides a good exemplar to your child.

Some might think that it is namby-pamby craziness to do this, that you are merely teaching your child never to be responsible for their misbehaviour.

In fact, you are acting as a good model and, if fully explained, it helps them to grasp that they are surrounded by a finegrained web of social obligations when in the company of others.





Jacobs, and his father, Dr Martin James, were respected clinicians in their time. Both had difficult, although privileged, childhoods. His father was one of seven, including six competitive brothers – “The level of nastiness between those brothers was considerable” – and his mother was brought up by servants, mainly an illiterate Tasmanian nanny, who, while infinitely better than Lydia’s cold and distant mother, was prone to hitting the little girl. Determined to buck the pitfalls of her own childhood, when James’s mother had her three girls and one boy in quick succession – “an act of absolute insanity given what she was like, but they had this weird idea that a happy family was a big family” – she refused to employ help. Through psychoanalysis, she tried to right the wrongs of her own past (her mother ended up in a mental hospital, her father committed suicide when she was 14 and her favourite brother did the same two years before James was born). “The psychoanalysis was crap back then,” James admits. “They probably dined on about her wanting to shag her father and

**“In that one week I realised, “Yes, I was a bad boy, but it wasn’t my fault!” My parents were very muddled and had caused me to be like this”**

kill her mother. It didn’t do nearly enough.”

His mother did not have the emotional equipment to deal with her young family. She was mildly depressed and would slump at the kitchen table, exhausted. “Her mood was one of resignation, with an undertow of anger.” A cousin revealed to James that his mother often left him screaming in his pram at the bottom of the garden of their home in St John’s Wood. As a result, what he calls his “electrochemical thermostat” was set in “angry”, “risk-taking” and “sad” modes. As he grew older, his mother would often resort to violence in an attempt to tame his aggression. He left various prep schools for an assortment of nasty attacks on other boys – including breaking one’s arm. He bragged and was spoilt. His parents oscillated between liberal permissiveness – “play” was important (as it is to James vis-à-vis his own children) – and conventional discipline. His youngest sister, Lucy, was his only ally and he remains close to her. At 16, with him looking as if he was going to fail all his exams, despite being

at Eton, his father sat him down with a glass of Pimm’s on the Thames and outlined his choices. He could leave school and get a job mending railway tracks, or work hard and aim for Cambridge. James never looked back. It was, he says, his father who saved him from himself. “I couldn’t have done it without him.” James got to Cambridge to read social anthropology and then did an MA in child development at Nottingham. Throughout his twenties, he lived in the family home, and in fact his broadcasting career, which began with a six-part documentary *Men on Violence*, followed by *Room 113* in which he grilled celebrities, did not take off until he was 34. “I was an extremely late developer.”

He had seven years of bad psychoanalysis between the ages of 30 and 37, before finding an analyst who started to get to the bottom of his childhood. In November 2006, by now the father of two children with both his parents dead, James underwent the Hoffman Process, an eight-day residential “rollercoaster” which forces you back into your past. “Just in that one week, I realised that, ‘Yes, of course I was a bad boy but it wasn’t my f\*\*\*ing fault!’ My parents were very muddled and had caused me to be like this. The lovely thing about going through this process is that it takes you on so that you can also see it from your parents’ point of view. Once you understand that, you feel nothing but love or sorrow or whatever. I very much got to that point.”

James’s story is the perfect illustration of his thesis – a mother who failed to recognise her limitations, who as a consequence damaged her children. But does asking people to look to their childhoods to explain their shortcomings not encourage our popular culture of complaint? Maybe he was just a nasty little boy? His sisters seem to have come off more lightly. “I’m not in favour of people just going round slagging off their parents,” he says, “but it is helpful to understand what happened to you in your early years and how this has affected the choices and personality traits you have as an adult. But I agree there is a certain kind of bad therapy that can lead people to say, ‘It’s my genes’, or to avoid responsibility.”

James is working away on his next book, *Love Bombing*, which explores proven techniques of how parents can reverse any damage, perceived or real, done to their children. This is mostly through practical techniques such as one-on-one time with a child up to the age of 11, including weekends away and “special time”, combined with bombing the child with love and affection. “The effects are amazing,” he says. He sighs. “I wish I could bring that book out tomorrow. Now that is a book I think could really help a lot of people.” ■

## Ban strict routines

The great thing to remember is that babies are satiable, that once they are fed, or get some sleep, or are given a hug, the need is met. They are not like many adults in this regard. There is a great deal of evidence that very strict routines do not lead to so-called contented babies.

It is true that, on the whole, babies whose mothers go to them when they cry in the night or who co-sleep are less likely to sleep through the night. However, there is also good evidence that strict sleep routines do lead to more insecure, and to more irritable and fussy, babies.

While you may be scared that “indulging” them will be just the first step towards a clingy, greedy, needy, selfish toddler and to a child who cannot obey rules at school, the very opposite is the case. It is the babies whose needs have been met who become the secure, calm, satisfied children and productive schoolchildren, and adults – the ones you might say were spoilt and indulged as babies.

## Don’t let them snack on sweets

In a sample of 12,500 British children born after 2000, the ones whose mothers worked full-time were more likely to be consuming sweetened drinks, and snacking on sweets and crisps between meals.

They were less likely to be eating three portions of fruit a day. The mothers’ sheer lack of time was thought to be likely to be a major reason for this.

The connection between sweet-eating and violence was shown in a large nationally representative British sample followed from their births in 1970. It found that men who had eaten confectionary daily when aged 10 were significantly more likely to be violent at age 34. The researchers showed that this was more than just a correlation.

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Extracts from *How Not to F\*\*\* Them Up* by Oliver James, which is published by Vermilion on June 3. *How Not to F\*\*\* Them Up* is available from The Times Bookshop priced £14.99 (RRP £17.99), free p&p, on 0845 2712134; [timesonline.co.uk/bookshop](http://timesonline.co.uk/bookshop)

Sources: Separation from parents: Huddy et al. 2002; Resilience et al. 2007; Crawford et al. 2008. The naughty step: page 34 R7. Stress during pregnancy: O’Connor et al. 2005. Not claiming genetics: James. 2002. Strict routines: Johnson et al. 2008; Hogg et al. 2009. St James-Pickering et al. 2008. Sweet eating: Howells et al. 2009; Moore et al. 2009.

