

1. Are we doing this well?

As soon as you have a child, you receive thousands of pieces of advice. The insecurity remains. Such a small child is vulnerable and dependent. Are we doing okay as parents? If there are some things that you missed yourself as a child, do you pass that on to your child? You read nothing about that in the parenting books.

2. I am a better mother now than when I stayed at home.

I stayed at home for nine years. I never want to do that again. I took my frustration out on the children. Now, I'm taking courses and I am an intern at a daycare. Soon I want a job. I am away more often, but now I am a much better mother.

3. Part of the job: talking to your child about sexuality

Toprak plays with his penis sometimes.

‘Look momma, it’s gotten bigger.’”

“Your penis is awake’, I tell him. He knows what the sanitary pad is, I’ve explained why

women use it. My own parents were also very open. I could talk to them about anything. I

hope that Toprak learns to do that later as well. That he doesn’t think: my parents don’t think this is good, I won’t tell them anything.”

4. As a fathers you should know what your children are doing

”Moroccan boys are no good”they say. It hurts, but they are right. They are just annoying and have deserved the criticism. I would like to see more Moroccan fathers taking this on.”

5. Letting go of your child is the most difficult part.

‘My oldest daughter has a boyfriend and wanted her own place. She is just 17, I don’t understand it. Why did she want to leave? At home, she has all her freedom. Through many conversations, we arrived here. My child is not my possession, I’ve learned that. Still, that is the most difficult thing, trusting your child and letting go.’

6. Negotiating? We don't do that.

“Valerie en Ida have all the space to play, it can get messy. Friends are always welcome.

Everything is possible, as long as they stick to the rules. We determine the rules. Why should

you have to explain everything to your children? Because they won't like you otherwise?

Rubbish!”

7. It's nice that sometimes others also care for our children.

“On the playground, we come in contact with other parents. Because we have a lot of contact in the neighborhood, it is sometimes easier to intervene if a child gets teased. Some parents are more free than we are. We don't get involved in their manner of raising children. You don't do that. It becomes critical too quickly. It just remains sensitive.”

8. Work is important, but the children come first.

Astrid works full-time. I work 28 hours per week. We each have days when we are

responsible for taking care of the kids.

One of us is home when Sem and Dani come home

from school. If the children are home, it must be nice and cosy. We don't want

“latch-key

kids”, we want to be there for them.

9. Let's have some wine together

“Let's drink a glass of wine together”, I sometimes tell Nikki. As long as she drinks alcohol in moderation, she ought to be allowed. In order not to make a problem out of it, I keep an eye on what she is drinking. She is already seventeen and this is working well for her.’

10. We are divorced but we still have contact almost every day

As co-parents, you have to accept that sometimes your ex does things differently. Arnold is stricter than I am. We have learned to respect each other and keep in touch almost on a daily basis. Previously, this was confusing for the children. “Can’t you also come along?”, Daan sometimes asked when he and Mieke were going to Arnold’s and his girlfriend’s for the weekend.

11. If we could afford it, we would also have them take music lessons

Our children go to swimming lessons, gymnastics and tennis. If we could afford it, we would also have them take music lessons. Even though they are still so little, we want them to try everything. Their development is top priority.

12. It's ok for my son to be seen

Medi is mentally handicapped. He can neither walk nor speak. He lives in an assisted living home, but every weekend he comes home. I go out with him as much as possible. "Do you have to go out with him again already?" my husband asks me sometimes. Medi is a handsome kid. It's ok for him to be seen.

13. We're not erasing their Ethiopian heritage

"Could my mother not care for me? Or did she not want to?", asked Endeshaw one day. Endeshaw and Maryam were both born in Ethiopia. We know nothing about their biological parents. We are raising them just as all loving parents do. We regularly talk about Ethiopia. If there is an athletic competition, we always cheer for the African marathon runners.