

I Didn't Sign Up For This!



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"One Improved Unit" is an original bi-weekly column appearing every other Monday at Everything-Voluntary.com, by the founder and editor Skyler J. Collins. Archived columns can be found [here](#). OIU-only RSS feed available [here](#).

My parenting has evolved considerably over the last two years. Where I'm at now is not where I thought I would be. When my wife and I decided to have kids, I figured that raising them would require a reasonable level of physical discipline, administered in the proper proportions based on their behavioral needs, as well as 5 years of having them with us all day followed by 13 years of dumping them off at school for 8 hours, most of the week, most of the year. In other words, what I signed up for was the type of life I had had, but for my kids. Yes, I wanted their life to be "better," but with the right combination of new gadgets and vacation destinations, sure, their lives could be considered "better." Instead, logical consistency and conscience have compelled me to scrapping all of that in lieu of a truly "better" experience. So I can honestly say that, "No, I did not sign up for this!"

The Parenting I Didn't Sign Up For

It turns out my kids have needs. Needs that must be met in certain ways. If I don't meet them properly, then frustration, disconnection, hurt, resentment, and headaches ensue. I thought I knew how to meet them. I was wrong. I've learned better. And then when I thought I knew how to meet them properly, I was wrong again. But not because of what I knew about meeting them, but because of what I knew about myself. I thought that I just needed to give them the required attention in the moment, and once passed, I was free to do what I wanted to do with my time. Having now shifted gears, a new problem would arise (oh the life of kids!) and I revert to the parenting mode I *did* sign up for, and then frustration, disconnection, hurt, yadda, etc. ensued.

Ugh! Why isn't this working? Oh, because I thought I could apply it half-assed. Duh. Any non-idiot could see that needs must be properly met again, and again, and again. You can't meet one of your kids' needs and then expect to be done "for the day." (Especially if you have more than one kid.) Doesn't work like that. Kids have, literally, a thousand needs. And if I'm going to be the parent I believe they need and deserve, than I can't allow myself to do it half-assed. But it's so hard! And I didn't sign up for this, so there!

The Lifestyle I Didn't Sign Up For

There are kids' needs that must be met by their parents *qua* parents, and then there are kids' needs that must be met by their parents *qua* mentors and learning facilitators. What I signed up for was *only* the former. Their educational needs would be met by "professional" educators. They know what to do and did it well enough for me (hah!). Let *them* be burdened by my kids' curiosities, active natures, and society's expectations of Educated Man. But I've since learned better. My kids' needs are *my* responsibility. And more, those needs must be met properly, or frustration, disconnection, hurt, resentment, and headaches ensues.

No less for their education than for their "discipline" did I think I had it figured out only to learn that I didn't properly understand myself. And I'm still learning very painfully and with much wailing and gnashing of teeth what it takes *to be* an unschooling dad, the only kind that could raise his kids as unschoolers. Thought I was done playing that game or aiding in the construction of that puzzle and I could shift gears and focus on my own things? Think again idiot! You didn't sign up for this, no, but now you've given them too much a taste of sweet freedom to back down now. I can't conscript them into ~~prison~~ school, ohh no... it's too late for that. So getting it together, I best be doing.

Final Thoughts

Indeed not, did I sign up for *this*. Not much I can do about it now that would not create two enemies for myself, for life. They've been spoiled and spoiled good! Oh yes, I've spoiled their little love cups to overflowing at times, but how painful its been when I've thought I was done. I can't expect to ever be done. I just can't. I won't! No, not until they give me leave and say "well done, Dad, well done."